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Canada, Prime Minister, 1935 —
(W.L.M. King)

Let Free Men Face Reality!

By

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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE W. L. MACKENZIE KING, M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada

An Address Delivered before THE CANADIAN CLUB
September 17th, 1941



Let Free Men Face Reality!

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Why I Went to England

In my visit to Britain, I had several purposes in view. The first was the fulfilment of a natural desire to visit the United Kingdom at this time of war and thus to emphasize, in the minds of the people of the old land and before the world, Canada's position at Britain's side. I wished to supplement my recent visit to the Canadian forces in various parts of our country with a visit, however brief, to the fighting men who are upholding the name and honour of Canada overseas. I was anxious to convey a word of greeting to our soldiers, sailors and airmen from their homes and families, and to bring back, as I fortunately am able to do, some word of re-assurance of their well-being, to those whom they have left behind.

I desired to renew my friendship with the Prime Minister of Great Britain and to have the opportunity of personal conference with Mr. Churchill and his colleagues, and with professional experts on questions of strategy and, in particular, matters pertaining to Canada's war effort. I was desirous of seeing and learning at first hand as much as might be possible of actual conditions in Britain after two years of war. Most of all perhaps, I wished from the point of vantage which Britain provides, to survey in its true proportions and perspective the scene of world-wide conflict, and to obtain from the best informed sources, as accurate a picture as possible of the present position of the war, its probable trends and duration.

These were large and important purposes. Any one of them might well have absorbed a much longer time than it was possible for me to give to all combined. Having, however, from the outset of the war, been in closest touch with the government of Britain and having followed in detail from official sources the course of events from day to day, I feel that, short though my stay in England necessarily was, it was sufficiently long to meet

in considerable part each of the purposes I had in view.

For obvious reasons, I shall this evening be obliged to restrict such account of my visit as it may be possible for me to give, to but one of its main objectives, leaving for parliament or for other occasions such further account of additional features as it may be expected and desirable for me to give. I propose, therefore, to speak of the impression which the visit as a whole has left of the present position of the war. Of that, I am sure you are anxious above all else to hear.

The Courageous People of Britain

Let me say, however, in advance, just one word about the people of Britain and our own fighting forces overseas. After two years of war, the men and women of that beleaguered isle are, I believe, more resolute, more determined, more courageous than ever. But they have, I believe, a greater burden than ever to bear. It has been well and truly said that "the worst part of martyrdom is not the last agonizing moment; it is the wearing, daily steadfastness." That is what one realizes in Britain, as it can only be

realized in a country which daily faces the threat of actual invasion, and has already suffered actual destruction of its cities, its national monuments and its homes.

The scene of devastation in bombed-out areas, such as the one surrounding St. Paul's Cathedral and covering a vast part of the city of London, is truly appalling. That destruction is paralleled in many parts of the United Kingdom. Those scenes must be ever present in the minds of the men and women of Britain. They relate to the past but they are even more terrifying in what they disclose of a possible future. It is this burden which, in addition to all others, the people of Britain are called upon continually to bear.

A respite from bombing such as has been experienced in greater or less degree since the beginning of the Russian campaign may cause the visitor to Britain to feel that many of the nation's activities are proceeding as usual, as indeed they are, to an extent which is nothing short of marvellous. But the martyrdom of daily anxiety and prolonged weariness is ever present.

Canadians in the Front Line

It is in this light that Canada's contribution to the cause is best understood. The most casual visitor to Britain — to almost any part of the island — could not fail to realize that the Canadians are numbered among her defenders, nor how grateful the people of Britain are for their presence. Make no mistake about it, the British people know our men are at their side. There are, as you all know, in Britain today well over 100,000 of Canada's fighting men. The significance the British people and the British government attach to Canada's military contribution to the defence of Britain on land, at sea and in the air, I can perhaps best leave to the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to say.

Every Canadian heart must have been thrilled by Mr. Churchill's words when he said that our Canadian soldiers stood "at the very point where they would be the first to be hurled into a counter-stroke against the invader." I can assure you that it was no flight of rhetoric, but a measured statement, when Mr. Churchill further said that no greater service could be rendered to Britain, and no more important military duty

performed by any troops in all the Allies, and when, after referring to what had taken place in other theatres of war, he added that the part they have played in bringing about the final result was second to none.

But the fighting men of Canada are not only sharing in the defence of Britain; they are also helping to carry the war into the enemy's territory. Our pilots and airmen are daily engaged in actual operations. In the growing numbers of Canadian pilots, observers and air gunners, serving with the Royal Air Force and in the Squadrons of the Royal Canadian Air Force in Britain, we are already witnessing the telling effect of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, which daily looms larger in the strategy of the war.

The nature of the work of Canada's Navy, in British waters and on the North Atlantic, does not lend itself to display, but I found, in informed circles, a full knowledge and very warm appreciation of the importance of Canada's naval co-operation with Britain.

From all sides, I heard nothing but praise of the machines and weapons of war which Canada is sending across the sea in ever

growing volume. Canadian industry and Canadian labour may well be proud of their part in forging the tools of victory. In a struggle in which machines are essential, we can afford to spare no effort to maintain the momentum of our war production. Speaking what I knew was in the minds and hearts of our farmers and others of our growers and producers, I was indeed proud to be able to assure the government and the people of Britain that Canada would send them all the food that ships could be found to carry.

Mr. Churchill's Tribute to Canada

I shall leave it to Mr. Churchill himself to express what Britain feels concerning Canada's war effort. I have already quoted some of his words spoken at the Mansion House less than a fortnight ago. Let me conclude this portion of my remarks with further words spoken, on the same occasion, by the Prime Minister of Britain. It is the message I bring back from the government and people of Britain to my colleagues in the Cabinet and to the people of Canada. Here are Mr. Churchill's words :

“The war effort of Canada during this war happily, has not so far

required effusion of blood upon a large scale but that effort, in men, in ships, aircraft, air training, in finance, in food, constitutes an element in the resistance of the British Empire without which that resistance could not be successfully maintained."

The Leaders of England

Of Mr. Churchill himself and of his colleagues, I should like to say a word. Having sat with them in Council, I would say that I marvel at the fidelity, ability, and resiliency with which they carry the burden of their great responsibilities. They are surrounded by the best of professional expert opinion and advice. Their discussions are supplemented by the freest interchange of view and opinion with the governments of the several Dominions. I feel that for purposes of Commonwealth consultation, at a time of war it would be difficult, if not impossible, to improve upon what in effect is a continuing conference of Cabinets, established, under the system of immediate and constant communication, as it had come into being prior to the beginning of the war, and has since been developed.

Of Mr. Churchill, I should like to repeat what I said in London, in his presence, and in the presence of his fellow countrymen; that of him, history, I believe, will record that, by his example and his leadership, he has helped to save, not his country only, but the freedom of the world.

I was deeply impressed by the new bonds which have been established between the King and Queen and the people. The immediate way in which Their Majesties have shared the dangers, the sorrows and the sufferings of the people has greatly deepened the hold the King and Queen have always had on their loyalty and affections. May I pause, here, to repeat the heartfelt greetings which I was asked by King George and Queen Elizabeth to give to the people of Canada. Her Majesty Queen Mary also wished me to convey her remembrances and good wishes to the Canadian people.

The Real Issue at Stake

Were I to seek to express in a single sentence what, above all else, has impressed itself most deeply upon my mind as the result of my visit to Britain, I would say it was the

confirmation, beyond the shadow of a doubt, of the view I have held, from the outset of the war, of the real issue in the struggle, of the nature of the forces in conflict, and of the probable scale of the conflict itself. That view, I expressed, in the following words, in a broadcast delivered on the day Britain entered the war :

“ The forces of evil have been loosed in the world in a struggle between the pagan conception of a social order which ignores the individual and is based upon the doctrine of Might, and a civilization based upon the Christian conception of the brotherhood of man, with its regard for the sanctity of contractual relations, and the sacredness of human personality.”

We have now entered upon the third year of war. It has taken two years of conflict to convince the world — if, indeed, all peoples are even yet convinced — of the truth of that statement. The wonder, however, is, not that it should have taken two years to bring the truth home to mankind; the marvel rather is that, in the space of two years, Nazi Germany should have been able so clearly to demonstrate its accuracy.

How, it may be asked, was it possible to discern, at the outbreak of war, that the issue was what it is; that the forces were what they are, and that the conflict, ere its close, would be on a world scale? The answer to those questions is to be found in the philosophy of modern Germany, in the ambitions of Germany, revealed, time after time, since the days of Bismarck, and in Nazi deception, terror and violence. To any one who had studied the history of Germany for the last hundred years, it should not have been difficult to realize that the forces being loosed upon the world, and the methods to be employed in the wider struggle, would be those with which the Nazis had gained control of Germany itself. The issue to be fought out on a world scale was the issue between the Nazis and their defeated opponents in Germany. Unless the Nazi power was destroyed, it was clear that it would seek to expand its sway, without limits of space or time.

All Nations Are Menaced

When war came, the light of a Christian civilization had already been extinguished in Nazi Germany. Human freedom and, with

it, human brotherhood had already been crushed. Every interest had been made subordinate to the creation of the most powerful military machine ever known. Men who resisted were ruthlessly imprisoned or murdered. Deception, terror and violence had become the practised arts of statecraft.

Since September, two years ago, these same forces have been loosed, first, beyond the boundaries and across the territories of the countries bordering on Germany, and then, as her conquests mounted, farther and farther afield. Today no country is too remote to be menaced by the deception of Nazi agents, by the terror of the Gestapo, or by the violence of German armed aggression. The Nazi sway knows no limits but the limits of Nazi rapacity and Nazi power.

Two years ago ambition so unlimited, and aims so vast, appeared, to most men, utterly fantastic. The scope and magnitude of so great a danger were to many, at the time, beyond comprehension.

It is not surprising that national security at that time was still conceived of in terms of neutrality, and that individual countries

should still have thought of their position in terms of powerful isolation. If there is one thing that the last two years has made plain, it is surely that, as a means of escape from the encircling danger which now threatens the entire world, no nation which wishes to see freedom survive can now look to anything so old fashioned as its own sovereign rights, or so restricted as its own unaided strength. Remoteness from the immediate scene of conflict has ceased to be a safeguard for men and nations that cherish their freedom. Surely we have now come to see that, even in seeking the preservation of our own freedom, all who cherish freedom are members one of another, without regard to class or race or nationality. If human freedom is to survive, all free men, regardless of national frontiers, must work together for its preservation.

National Power Exalted Above Humanity

Some years ago, I made a special study of the problems of industry, and of the principles on which industrial reconstruction should be based if, after years of war, industrial strife were not to follow international strife. At that time, more than twenty-two years ago,

I reached the conclusion that there could be no permanent peace in industry unless the claims of humanity, in industrial relations, were recognized as superior to those of industry. In other words, it seemed to me that industry must recognize that it existed to serve the needs of humanity; not that humanity existed to serve the greed of industry. I felt at the time — though I did not do more than express it in passing — that what was true of industry was equally true of nationality; that unless the claims of humanity were recognized as superior to those of any one nation or group of nations, we should never have enduring international peace. I should like to emphasize that truth today. As I viewed the present conflict after two years of war, from the vantage ground of Britain, one reflection impressed itself more than all else, upon my mind. It was the impression of the evil of national power when it exalts itself above humanity.

Britain still stands. But look at what stretches before her: a Europe which, all but completely from the Atlantic to the steppes of Russia, lies prostrate at the feet of Germany.

People everywhere have been asking the question: why did Hitler attack Russia? The answer, it seems to me, is a very simple one. It is the answer which today would be given to the same question asked regarding Poland, or Norway, or Holland, or Belgium, and all the other countries of Europe that he has already conquered or invaded. Hitler attacked in order that he might gain in strategic position, in resources, and in power. He sought also to remove the last potential menace of land attack, upon his forces of tyranny, before the Nazis became locked in mortal conflict with what remained of the forces of freedom, at the spearhead of which the peoples of Britain continue to stand.

President Roosevelt on an Axis Victory

The President of the United States, in the latest of his great pronouncements, did not hesitate to say: "It must be explained again and again to people who like to think of the United States navy as an invincible protection, that this can be true only if the British navy survives. That if the world outside the Americas falls under Axis domination, the shipbuilding facilities which the Axis powers

would then possess in all of Europe, in the British Isles and in the Far East would be much greater than all the shipbuilding facilities and potentialities of all the Americas—not only greater, but two or three times greater.”

Do I need to say more? It must surely be apparent that, if freedom is to be preserved anywhere in this world, we have now come to a time and place where forces of vaster scope and proportions than those of any single nation or empire, however powerful, must unite in opposing those forces which today seek world conquest and world domination. Union merely in purpose and aim will not be sufficient. The world's free forces must act increasingly as one, in every aspect of the common cause, if humanity is to be saved a prolonged and bitter agony. Nothing less than one vast brotherhood of freedom will suffice today to preserve the world's freedom.

British-American Interdependence

I said, in London, that nothing in recent months had been more significant than the recognition of the deepening interdependence of the British Commonwealth and the United States. That deepening interdependence is

the brightest light I see upon the world's horizon at the beginning of this third year of war. Let me emphasize here its true significance. That deepening interdependence has not developed because Britain or the British Commonwealth of Nations are weaker today than they have been hitherto. They are, I believe — in fact, I know — far stronger than they have ever been. It is not that the defences of the United States are weaker. They are, in fact, far stronger than they ever were.

The growing sense of interdependence has arisen because, while, albeit, at the sacrifice of assistance to other nations the British Commonwealth and the United States might each for itself be able to resist invasion and conquest, each is coming to realize that neither acting alone could destroy a military machine such as Germany already possesses and is in a position further to strengthen. Without the common action of both, the present war might well drag on for years, and the world be reduced to a condition of chaos which will make decisive victory, not to mention reconstruction impossible.

Prussian Militarism

What we have all still to learn is that, while the Nazi leaders are masters of the arts of deception, of intrigue, of brutality and terror, beneath the Nazi machine is the Prussian military machine. Compared in power with Naziism, Prussian militarism is as the ocean itself to the foam engendered upon its surface in a storm. It is the most powerful engine of destruction the world has ever known.

Behind Germany's numbers, behind the extent of her conquests, behind the new resources of which, for the time being at least, the Germans have become the masters, lies the Prussian mind. It is the real force behind the Nazi terror. It is the real secret of German power. It remains the implacable foe. The German war machine, the inhuman monster which the Prussian mind has created and continues to direct has already ravaged a whole continent, and impoverished, enslaved, strangled or devoured millions of human lives. It is a dragon which can only be slain by fighting men.

From now on, let free men everywhere face reality. Let them recognize that it is

something infinitely greater than the fate of any country which they are called upon to defend; that it is the defence of freedom not of any country, not of any continent, of any hemisphere, but that it is the freedom of mankind which is at issue. For we are all members one of another.

Lincoln on Freedom

In notes on his play, "Abe Lincoln in Illinois", Robert E. Sherwood has a most illuminating passage on the man whose life he has sought to portray. He tells us that Lincoln, from a man of doubt and indecision — even of indifference — became astonishingly transformed into a man of passionate conviction and decisive action. Lincoln, he states, was always opposed, in theory, to slavery, but was even more opposed to the stirring up of trouble. He knew that in the slave question were stores of high explosive which, if ignited, could destroy the Union. Insofar as he was concerned, North and South could have gone on living together, harmoniously, half slave and half free, had that been possible. But in those stirred and troubled years, says Sherwood, the United States was refusing to remain, as it

had been, divided into North and South. The wheels of the covered wagons were beginning to cut long furrows across the plains beyond the Mississippi River. Lincoln had frequent contact with the drivers of those covered wagons. To his progressive spirit, it became a personal matter when he heard increasingly hot arguments as to whether all that vast territory of the West should be slave or free. It was the question of the extension of slavery, says Sherwood, which converted Lincoln into the leader of a militant cause. If he was willing to let the South mind its own business, he was not willing to stand by in silence when it threatened to establish domination of the West.

In one of the acts of Sherwood's play, a little boy is lying sick in a covered wagon. His people are travelling far to seek a new home — to make the earth a good place for their children to live in. They are not afraid of the perils that lie along the way.

Lincoln humbly prays to God that their child be not taken from his parents. "Grant him", Lincoln prays, "the freedom of life. Do not condemn him to the imprisonment of death. Do not deny him his birthright. Let

him know the sight of great plains and high mountains, of green valleys and wide rivers. For this little boy is an American, and these things belong to him, and he to them. Spare him, that he too may strive for the ideal for which his fathers have laboured, so faithfully and for so long."

The prayer which Lincoln gave for this sick boy was, in effect, says Sherwood, a prayer for the survival of the United States of America.

History is forever repeating itself. The parallel between the great crisis in the history of the United States, and the issue which faces the world today is almost complete. The difference lies solely in the scale upon which the human drama is unfolding itself. In Lincoln's day, it was the fate of a single country which was threatened because of its people being half slave and half free. Could that great country, as its settlement developed and its numbers increased, continue to exist half slave and half free? That was the question Lincoln asked himself, and he saw that there was but one answer to the question. Either the United States would become, in the course of time, all free, or slavery would

everywhere exist. The issue, he believed, had to be fought out, and fought out to a finish.

The lesson Lincoln learned in his day has come to have world-wide application today. It is one thing for a people to determine for itself its own form of government and its own way of life. That is a right recognized fully in the Atlantic Charter. It is quite another for any nation to attempt to force its form of government and its way of life upon other peoples. It is because Nazi Germany has chosen to force her so-called order upon all peoples, that, for free men, there is no choice but to crush Hitler and his Nazi system and to rid the world forever of the Prussian militarism on which it is founded.

A Conflict Between Continents

As I look at the world today, that is the picture as it presents itself to my inner vision. Only instead of the scene of conflict between slavery and freedom being confined to a single country, it has already assumed the proportions of a conflict between continents. It may rapidly become a war between hemispheres. The issue will have to be fought out. It will have to be fought out to a finish.

The line which, today, separates the remaining free peoples of the world, from those already enslaved, may not be as clearly defined as was the line between the North and South in the America of Lincoln's day. But it is a line even more sharply defined by brutality and barbarity. In the world today, as in the Union of Lincoln's day, it is the West that must decide the issue. Already, the barbaric hordes infest virtually the whole of Europe. Only Britain remains free. Behind the lands already conquered, they are fighting desperately for even vaster domains. They must not be allowed to complete their conquests in the old world. For, let there be no mistake, it is no more possible for an Eastern hemisphere, enslaved, to rest in harmony with a Western hemisphere that is free, than for darkness and light to dwell together. Either the free forces of the world must destroy the forces of tyranny which, in two years, have plunged Europe into mediaeval darkness, or themselves come to be held in thrall by the evil powers which, today, seek the world's domination.

Mankind cannot long continue half slave and half free. A world, half slave and half free, is the position that confronts the nations

today as we enter upon a third year of war. If their peoples are to keep their personal and national freedom, nations that are still free must fight, not in self defence only, but equally to rescue from the jaws and the claws of the Frankenstein monster that Germany has brought into being, the peoples of other lands, yes and of Germany herself whom otherwise it is destined also to devour and destroy.

Again, I repeat, humanity must no longer be made to serve national ends alone, whether those ends be mere isolated self defence or world domination. Nations everywhere must be made to serve and to save humanity. That is the supreme lesson, for all peoples, as we now enter upon a third year of war.

Canada Appeals to Free Men Everywhere

We are concluding tonight a week devoted to the reconsecration of the people of Canada to the great task which they undertook two years ago. That task, as I have said, is our part in the saving of humanity from a descent into universal chaos. In order speedily to accomplish that task, the total effort of all free men is needed. We in Canada can make no more effective appeal to free men through-

out the world than the appeal of our own example, as a people still removed from the heart of the struggle, yet putting forth our utmost effort.

I have already said that this war, in its essence, is not so much a war between nations as the clash of two opposing forces in the world. These two forces are present, in greater or less degree, in every nation and in every people. They are competing for the possession of the soul of man. They are nothing less than the forces of good and evil. The triumph of the cause of evil, which the Nazis have made their own, would usher in a world governed by men who believe Might is Right, and who would use force without limit or scruple to gain their ends. It would be a world of masters and slaves; a world of masters corrupted by the evil of perverted power, and of slaves condemned to the depths of human degradation.

But, if the forces of evil are routed; if Nazi Germany and all her wicked works are destroyed, this war will assume, in human history, the shape of a social revolution, out of which mankind may hope for a new order to emerge; an order in which the power of Right, not Might, will increasingly control,

and from which the injustices of the old order, one by one, will be banished. In this new order the rights of man will be determined not by privilege derived from inheritance, position or possessions, but, increasingly, by men's own contribution, through their own lives, to the common need and the common good.

Just one word in conclusion. You will gather from what I have said that I believe that two years of war have served not to lessen but to increase the magnitude of the conflict. For three months, a bloody and spectacular struggle has been waged in Eastern Europe. In that struggle, the resistance of Russian arms has been magnificent. The effort of Russia has, however, not been without its subtle dangers to our cause. In many hearts has been born the deceptive hope that Russia might win the war for us. There could be no more perilous illusion. Russia is fighting to save herself, as Poland, as Holland, as Belgium, as France, as Yugoslavia and as Greece fought to save themselves. Whatever the outcome in Russia may be, it should be realized that the power, the skill and the resources of the enemy are so great that the slightest relaxation of

effort in any direction would be fraught with the greatest of risks for all. Let us never forget the size and the power of Germany's war machine, and that while German forces fight on distant fronts, Germany herself and the countries controlled by Germany continue to manufacture the equipment and munitions needed to effect the necessary repairs and to keep her armed forces at the highest stage of efficiency.

I have said nothing of other theatres of war, and of other dangers, from which the Russian campaign with its tremendous and dramatic clash of great masses of men has tended, for the moment, to divert our attention. I have said nothing of Africa, or of the Orient, nothing of the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, or the Pacific. This war will not end until all the world is reduced to a condition of servitude, or until the nations that are still free triumph over Nazi Germany. We know that the free peoples will triumph in the end. But how long it may take to determine the issue, God alone knows.

How much, when it is over, may be left, of what is worth while in the world, no one can say. That is why I believe it is vital to make a supreme effort now to convince the

people of Germany that they never can hope to win. Such a supreme effort can be made only if every nation and every man, who is still free, put forth their utmost effort. "The length of the ordeal through which humanity must pass," to use words employed by President Roosevelt a night or two ago, "the extent of the wastage of human life; the chance for reconstruction, ere mankind encounters something in the nature of world chaos, all alike wait upon what it is possible for men, who are still free, to do, here and now.

So I would say to every one in our own, and in other lands, who has not yet found his true place in the war effort of his country:

"Rise! for the day is passing,
And you lie dreaming on;
The others have buckled their armour,
And forth to the fight have gone.
A place in the ranks awaits you,
Each man has some part to play;
The Past and the Future are nothing,
In the face of the stern To-day.
.....
Your arm will never be stronger,
Or the need so great as To-day."

*Issued by the Director of Public Information, Ottawa,
under authority of Hon. J. T. Thorson,
Minister of National War Services.*

Printed in Canada.

